

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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## CRITICAL HABITAT FOR SNAIL DARTER DETERMINED

Critical habitat for the snail darter, a small, three-inch long species of fish discovered in Tennessee in 1973, has been determined by Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Keith M. Schreiner, Associate Director, announced today.

The snail darter, Percina tanasi, occupies a 17-mile stretch on the Little Tennessee River in Loudon County, Tennessee. It inhabits only portions of clean, gravel shoals with cool, swift, low-turbidity water. The food of the snail darter is almost exclusively snails which are abundant on these shoals and also require clean gravel bottom for their survival.

One consideration used in determining the endangered status that was given to the fish last fall was the threatened destruction or modification of its habitat and range.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has determined that impoundment of water behind the Tennessee Valley Authority's proposed Tellico Dam would result in the total destruction of the snail darter's present known habitat and eventually cause the last natural occurring population of the fish in the wild to be destroyed. The dam project, underway for about 8 years, is more than half completed.

Several specimens of the species have been transplanted to the Hiwassee River, a tributary of the Tennessee River, and appear to be doing well. However, biologists believe it will take several years before they know for sure if the transplanted population survives and reproduces.

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